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ABSTRACT

This study identified the types of transition activities practiced by kindergarten teachers/schools around the country, the relation of various school characteristics to transition activities, and the relation between transition activities and parent involvement during kindergarten. The study sample was comprised of 2,826 public school and 417 private school kindergarten teachers participating in the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Kindergarten Class of 1998-99. Data were obtained from teacher and administrator questionnaires. Findings indicated that teachers used an average of three transition activities, the most common being phoning and sending information home about the program, inviting parents and children to visit the classroom prior to beginning school, and inviting parents to a pre-enrollment orientation. Teachers in schools with low proportions of at-risk children, minority children, or English language learners reported more transition activities than teachers in schools with higher proportions of these groups. Compared with teachers in public and other private schools, significantly higher proportions of teachers in Catholic schools reported telephoning or sending home information, hosting pre- enrollment visits by parents and children, and shortening school days at the start of the kindergarten year. Teachers in schools with lower proportions of low-income or minority families reported greater parent attendance at conferences, open houses, and art/music events. The proportion of parents volunteering regularly was associated with the proportion of low-income families. Regular parent volunteers were most prevalent in private schools. Several transition activities were associated positively with parent participation. Contains 10 references and 5 tables. (KB)

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1

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Rathbun & Germino Hausken, *How are Transition-to-Kindergarten Activities Associated with Parent Involvement during Kindergarten?* Paper presented at the American Educational Research Association's Annual Conference, Seattle, WA. April 2001.

How are Transition-to-Kindergarten Activities Associated with Parent Involvement during Kindergarten?

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Perspective

Children learn from new experiences and with time learn that expectations vary in different settings. In early childhood, transition-to-school describes the period in which children move from home to school or from preschool to kindergarten. Kindergarten functions as an introduction to the entire elementary and secondary school experience. It is a time for establishing competencies critical for successful school outcomes. The transition process is both transactional and developmental; children, families, schools, and communities interact socially to make school experiences supportive and responsive to the needs of children and their families. While some discontinuity of experience is a normal part of growing up, the ease with which children adjust to the new setting is of major concern (Love et al. 1992).

Parents and schools are encouraged to work together so all children can succeed in school. Research suggests that parental involvement in their children's education may help to explain differences in school outcomes (e.g., Comer 1985; Henderson 1987; Lee 1993; Nord, Brimhall, & West 1997) and some forms of parent involvement are more associated with children's performance than others (D'Agostino, Wong, Hedges, & Borman 1998).

Programs that enhance connections between the home and school and increase parent involvement with their children's education at school and home benefit both children and schools (Pianta & Walsh 1996; Ramey & Ramey 1994). Schools can provide opportunities for parents and children that facilitate positive relationships among children, families, teachers, and peers before and during the transition to kindergarten (Henderson 1987; Pianta & Walsh 1996). Transition activities that prepare both children and parents for the environmental and cultural differences that children will encounter in kindergarten include pre-enrollment orientation sessions for parents and their children, personal and written communications between the teachers and parents, and pre-enrollment home visits by teachers (Comer 1985; Love et al. 1992; Shore 1998). Once children are in school, schools can assure parents that they are welcome in their children's schools with invitations for families to attend school open houses, special events, and opportunities for parents to become involved in the school and classroom as volunteers. Other school-initiated transition-to-school activities to ease children's transition to kindergarten include having preschool children spend some time in the kindergarten classroom and shortening the school days at the beginning of the kindergarten year.

Information on the extent to which transition-to-kindergarten activities occur nationally is limited (e.g., Pianta et al. 1999; Love et al. 1992). In addition, not much is known about the association of such activities with parent involvement during the kindergarten year. This report first examines the degree to which transition-to-kindergarten activities offered by teachers or their schools are associated with various school characteristics. The school characteristics of interest include school sector, race/ethnic diversity of the school, the prevalence of English language learners (ELLs) and the level of school poverty (i.e., the proportion of free/reduced lunch eligible students in the school). Secondly, the report looks at the relationship between the use of transition activities and parent involvement.

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Research Questions

Specific research questions addressed by this paper include:

1. What types of transition-to-kindergarten activities do kindergarten teachers or their schools practice?
2. Does the use of various kindergarten transition activities differ by school characteristics?
3. Does the level of parent involvement in the kindergarten year differ by school characteristics?
4. What is the relationship between the use of transition-to-kindergarten activities and the level of parent involvement during kindergarten?

Data Source

Information on the types of transition-to-kindergarten activities practiced by kindergarten teachers or their schools is from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Kindergarten Class of 1998-99 (ECLS-K). All kindergarten teachers in the sampled schools were asked to participate in the study in the 1998-1999 school year, even if they did not have any children in their classrooms that were involved in the study. The sample for this report includes 2,826 public school and 417 private school kindergarten teachers for a total sample of 3,243 kindergarten teachers teaching full- or part-day kindergarten programs. In the spring of 1999, school administrators completed a self-administered questionnaire that collected information about their professional backgrounds and the characteristics of their schools. When appropriately weighted, the teacher sample is representative of about 190,200 kindergarten teachers in about 72,300 schools during the 1998-99 school year.

Data in this report are from the 1998 Fall and the 1999 Spring ECLS-K teacher questionnaires and the 1999 Spring school administrator questionnaire. All differences cited in this report are statistically significant at the .05 level with Bonferroni adjustment for multiple comparisons. The standard errors are reported in each of the tables.

Findings/Results

What types of transition-to-kindergarten activities do kindergarten teachers or their schools practice?

Kindergarten teachers were asked to identify whether they or their schools practiced any of six types of transition activities listed in the questionnaire. Activities included those held before children enrolled in kindergarten and those held after entry into kindergarten, such as:

- phoning or sending home information about the kindergarten program,
- preschoolers spending some time in the kindergarten classroom,
- parents and children visiting kindergarten prior to start of the school year,
- parents coming to an orientation before the kindergarten year,
- shortening the school days at the beginning of the kindergarten year, and
- teachers visiting the children's homes at the beginning of the kindergarten year.

In general, the teachers on average reported using about three of the six transition activities (table 1). The most common practices used by teachers to ease children's transition to kindergarten were phoning and sending information home about the kindergarten program, inviting parents and children to visit the kindergarten classroom prior to the start of the school year, and inviting parents to attend a pre-enrollment orientation. The least common activities that teachers reported that they or

their schools practiced were the shortening of the school days at the start of the school year and home visitations by teachers at the beginning of the school year (figure 1, table 2).

Does the use of various transition-to-kindergarten activities differ by school characteristics?

The number and type of activities used to smooth children's entry into kindergarten differed by school characteristics. The mean number of activities practiced was associated with the characteristics of the school (table 1). Teachers in schools with low proportions of at-risk children reported using more activities compared with teachers in schools with higher proportions of at-risk children. For example, teachers in schools with less than 10 percent minority enrollments reported using the most transition activities (3.5) and those with 50 percent or higher minority enrollments used the fewest (2.6) activities. In addition, teachers in schools where less than 10 percent of the school population were English language learners (ELLs) reported using more transition activities than teachers in schools where 25 percent or more of the student population was ELL (3.2 activities vs. 2.2 to 2.6 activities).

The use of various transition activities was associated with characteristics of the school's student population. In general, significantly more teachers in schools with low proportions of children at-risk for academic problems reported using specific types of transition activities (table 2). For example, the majority (90 percent) of teachers in schools with less than 10 percent ELL enrollment reported phoning or sending home information about the kindergarten program compared with 76 percent of teachers in schools where 50 percent or more of the school's children were ELLs (figure 2). Significantly more teachers in schools with low proportions of minority enrollments and ELLs used activities to establish relationships between parents and teachers and between teachers and children early such as pre-enrollment visits for parents and children, preschoolers spending time in the kindergarten classroom, and parent orientations (figure 3).

Although less than half of all the teachers reported having preschoolers spend some time in the kindergarten classroom before entering kindergarten, more teachers in schools with low proportions of minority enrollments (less than 10 percent) used this strategy compared with teachers in schools with 25 percent or higher minority enrollments. The proportion of teachers reporting that they or their schools used transition activities was also related to school sector. Significantly higher proportions of teachers in Catholic schools reported telephoning or sending home information, hosting pre-enrollment visits by parents and children, and shortening school days at the start of the kindergarten year compared with the proportions of teachers in public and other private schools.

Does the level of parent involvement during the kindergarten year differ by school characteristics?

The literature on early childhood education and development recommends frequent teacher-parent contact and opportunities for parents to participate with their children in the classroom. Kindergarten teachers in the ECLS-K study were asked to indicate the percent of children in their classes whose parents participated in school sponsored activities. The activities included teacher-parent conferences, school open houses or classroom parties, and art or music events or demonstrations. In addition, teachers were asked about the percent of children whose parents volunteered regularly in the classroom or school. The teachers rated the proportion of parents participating during the kindergarten year for each activity using a scale from 1 (no parents participating) to 5 (76 to 100 percent of parents participating) (table 3). For this study, the scale values were recoded to equal the midpoint of the range of percents in a particular category. For

example, the scale value of "2" (1-25 percent of parents participating) was converted to a value of 13. This approach allows for a more meaningful interpretation of the level of parent involvement.

The levels of parent participation in a school-related activity was associated with the proportions of children in the school who are from lower-income families, are ELL, are minorities and attend public schools (table 4). Teachers working in schools with lower proportions of children eligible for free- or reduced-priced lunch[1] reported greater parent attendance at conferences, open houses, and art/music events (figure 4). In schools with 50 percent or higher of the children from low-income households, less than two-thirds of parents attended parent conferences, and less than one-half attended school open houses or art/music events and demonstrations. Similar patterns were found when parent attendance was examined in terms of the proportion of minority students in the school. With the exception of attendance at art/music events, the proportion of ELLs in the school was not significantly related to parent attendance. Over half of parents in schools with less than 10 percent ELL children attended such events compared with around 40 percent of parents in schools with higher ELL concentrations. Lastly, teachers working in Catholic schools reported the highest parent attendance in teacher-parent conferences and attendance at open houses and art/music events was higher in private schools than in public schools.

The proportion of parents volunteering regularly in the classroom or school was associated with the proportion of children eligible for free- or reduced-priced lunch (figure 4). As the proportion of children from low-income households in the school increased, the proportion of parent volunteers decreased. In addition, teachers working in schools with more than 25 percent minority enrollments reported lower percentages of parents volunteering during the kindergarten year. In schools with the lowest proportion of ELLs, about one-quarter of parents volunteered regularly compared with about 16 percent of parents in schools with higher proportions of ELLs. Regular parent volunteers were most prevalent in private schools, where over a third of parents regularly helped in the school compared with about a fifth of parents whose children attend public schools.

What is the relationship between the use of transition-to-kindergarten activities and the level of parent involvement during kindergarten?

Several of the transition-to-kindergarten activities examined in this report were associated with greater parental involvement during children's kindergarten year (table 5). Teachers who reported that they or their school telephoned or sent home information about the kindergarten program indicated that a larger proportion of the children in their classrooms had parents who attended teacher-parent conferences, open houses or parties, and art/music events, and volunteered regularly in the classroom or school. The same pattern of parent involvement was found for teachers whose schools hosted pre-enrollment visits for parents and children, parent orientations, and had preschoolers spend some time in the kindergarten classroom (table 5).

Two transition activities that occur at the start of the school year were significantly associated with the level of parent involvement for some activities but not for all of them. Teachers who stated that they or another teacher visited the kindergartners' homes at the beginning of the year reported that parent attendance at music/art events and demonstrations was higher than in schools where the practice did not occur. Shortening the school day at the start of the year was associated with a higher level of regular parent volunteers in the classroom. These findings may be confounded with school

[1] The percent free/reduced lunch eligible variable has an item-level missing value rate of 26 percent; thus results should be interpreted with caution.

sector, since both of these transition practices occurred more often in private schools than in public schools. Moreover, a minority of kindergarten teachers practiced these two activities.

Conclusions/Educational Implications

Transition is more than a one-time event. It takes time, preparation, and planning. All schools can help make each child's transition into kindergarten more successful by providing support before, during and after entry into kindergarten.

The findings describe the typical experience of children and families making the transition to kindergarten. The experience involves the use of a few practices such as the receipt of telephone calls or information about the kindergarten program, pre-enrollment visits by parents and children to the kindergarten classroom, and parent orientations. The number and types of activities practiced by the teachers and their schools varied according to the characteristics of the school. Teachers in schools with high proportions of children at-risk for academic problems reported using few of the practices and using practices that can be characterized as low intensity, group-oriented activities.

In general, the analyses of the relationship between the transition-to-school practices and level of parent involvement showed a positive association between transition practices and parent involvement in school-related activities during the school year. The significance of the relationship of transition-to-school practices with the levels of parent involvement in school-sponsored activities cannot be underrated.

Rathbun & Germino Hausken, *How are Transition-to-Kindergarten Activities Associated with Parent Involvement during Kindergarten?* Paper presented at the American Educational Research Association's Annual Conference, Seattle, WA. April 2001.

Table 1. – Mean number of transition-to-kindergarten activities used, by school characteristics: Kindergarten Year 1998-1999

Characteristic	Mean number of transition activities used	s.e.
All kindergarten teachers	3.0	.04
Percent ELL in school		
less than 10%	3.2	.05
10-24%	2.9	.12
25-49%	2.6	.14
50% or more	2.2	.18
Percent minority in school		
less than 10%	3.5	.06
10-24%	3.2	.08
25-49%	3.0	.12
50% or more	2.6	.07
Percent free/reduced lunch in school*		
less than 10%	3.2	.13
10-24%	3.2	.08
25-49%	3.2	.08
50% or more	2.9	.08
School sector		
Public	3.1	.05
Catholic	3.5	.11
Other private	3.1	.14

* This variable has an item-level missing value rate of 26 percent; thus results should be interpreted with caution.

Source: Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Kindergarten Class of 1998-1999: Base-year Public-use Data Files. U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics.

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Figure 1. – Percentage of kindergarten teachers reporting various transition-to-kindergarten activities: Kindergarten Year 1998-1999

Source: Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Kindergarten Class of 1998-1999: Base Year Public-use Data Files. U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics.

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Table 2. – Percentage of kindergarten teachers reporting that various transition activities are held at the start of the school year for incoming kindergartners: Kindergarten Year 1998-1999

Characteristic	Phone or send home information about kindergarten program	s.e.	Parents and children visit kindergarten prior to start of year	s.e.	Parents come to orientation at school before kindergarten year	s.e.	Preschoolers spend some time in kindergarten classroom	s.e.	School days shortened at start of year	s.e.	Teacher visits homes at beginning of kindergarten year	s.e.
All kindergarten teachers	87	1.0	79	1.4	75	1.7	43	1.6	17	1.7	5	0.8
Percent ELL in school												
less than 10%	90	1.1	84	1.4	80	2.0	47	2.1	18	2.1	6	1.0
10-24%	84	3.2	81	4.0	73	4.4	32	4.5	16	5.5	6	3.7
25-49%	82	2.9	69	5.6	69	5.5	37	5.5	5	3.0	4	1.9
50% or more	76	4.4	45	7.1	58	8.9	38	6.1	8	4.4	1	1.0
Percent minority in school												
less than 10%	94	1.2	90	2.3	88	2.2	57	3.1	20	2.6	7	1.8
10-24%	92	2.0	87	2.1	79	3.2	42	5.1	19	3.9	5	2.2
25-49%	87	2.2	85	2.7	77	3.8	38	4.4	13	2.4	5	1.9
50% or more	80	1.8	66	3.1	66	3.6	38	2.8	15	2.8	4	1.0
Percent free/reduced lunch in school*												
less than 10%	91	1.9	87	2.1	77	4.0	46	4.1	21	3.3	7	2.0
10-24%	93	1.3	85	2.7	82	3.4	43	3.9	17	4.3	3	1.5
25-49%	89	1.9	88	2.0	84	2.7	51	4.5	10	2.2	5	2.5
50% or more	85	1.8	74	3.3	73	3.3	40	2.9	17	3.4	6	2.0
School sector												
Public	89	1.1	80	1.8	79	2.0	44	2.1	15	2.0	4	1.1
Catholic	95	1.7	90	2.5	80	4.5	51	4.1	40	5.7	4	3.3
Other private	84	3.2	87	2.5	70	4.6	50	4.5	16	3.8	12	2.7

* This variable has an item-level missing value rate of 26 percent, thus results should be interpreted with caution.

Source: Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Kindergarten Class of 1998-1999: Base-year Public-use Data Files. U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics.

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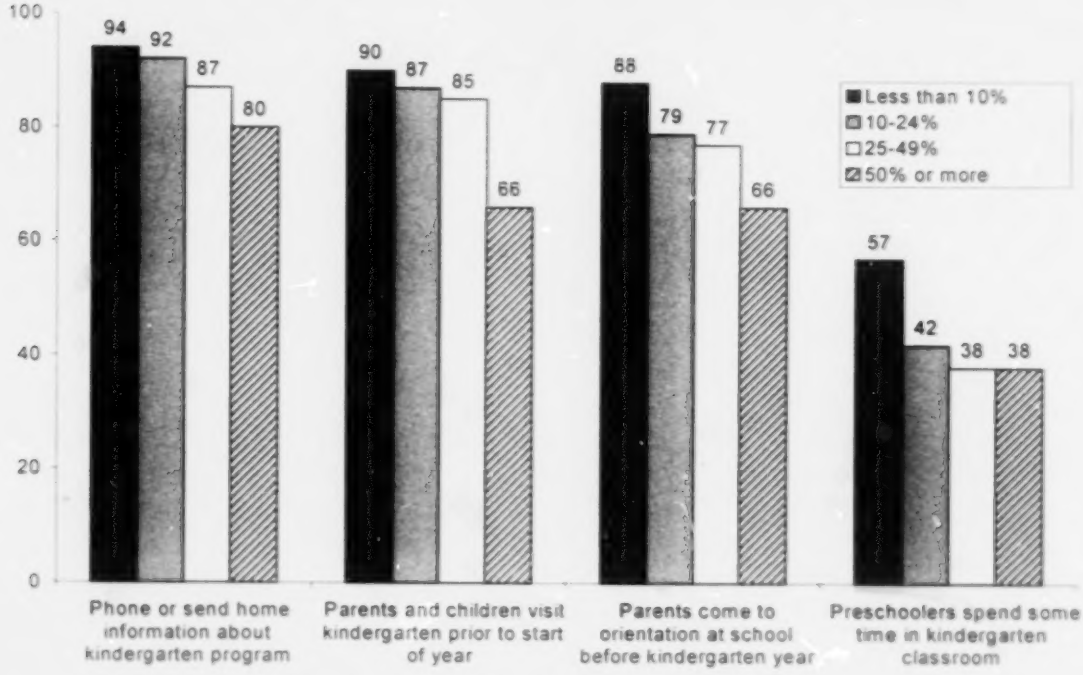
Figure 2. – Percentage of kindergarten teachers reporting various transition-to-kindergarten activities, by percent of minority children in the school: Kindergarten Year 1998-1999



Source: Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Kindergarten Class of 1998-1999: Base Year Public-use Data Files. U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics.

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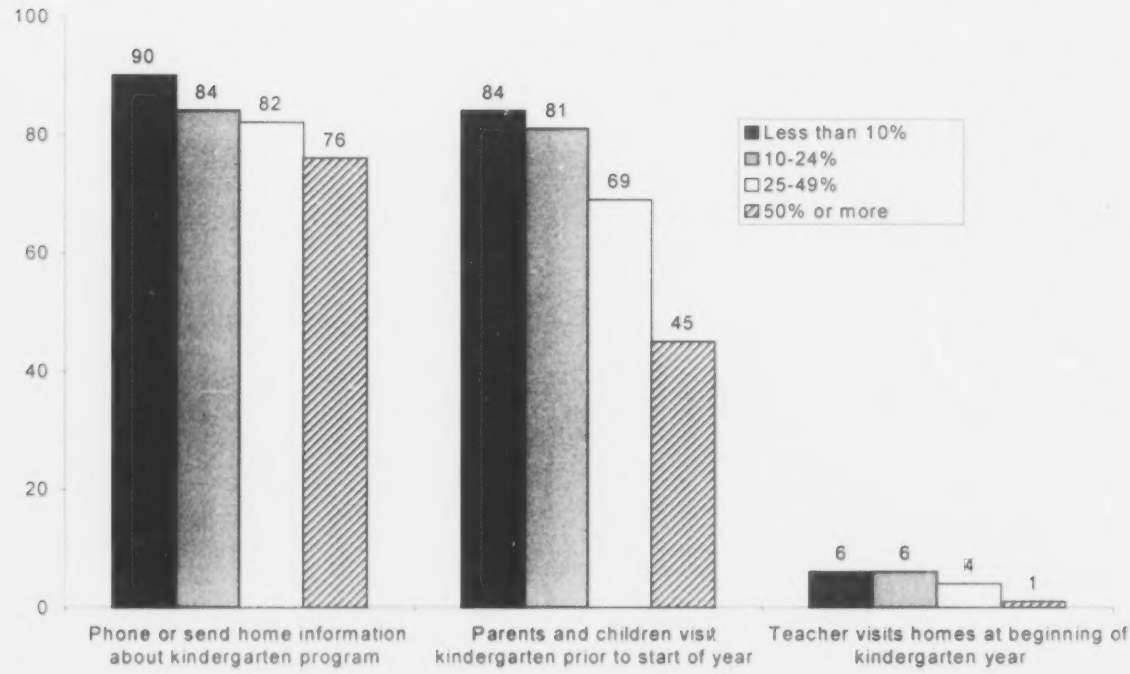
Figure 3. – Percentage of kindergarten teachers reporting various transition-to-kindergarten activities, by percent of English language learners (ELLs) in the school: Kindergarten Year 1998-1999.



Source: Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Kindergarten Class of 1998-1999: Base Year Public-use Data Files. U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics.

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Table 3 – Distribution of parental participation during the kindergarten year: Spring 1999

	Percent of parents participating during the kindergarten year									
Activity	None	s.e.	1-25%	s.e.	26-50%	s.e.	51-75%	s.e.	76% or more	s.e.
Attend teacher-parent conferences	1	0.2	8	0.8	10	0.9	15	0.9	66	1.5
Volunteer regularly to help in the classroom or school	13	1.0	59	1.1	14	0.8	8	0.5	6	0.6
Attend open houses or parties	1	0.1	22	1.1	23	0.9	24	1.0	31	1.2
Attend art/music events or demonstration	7	0.7	22	1.1	19	0.8	20	1.0	33	1.4

Source: Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Kindergarten Class of 1998-1999: Base-year Public-use Data Files. U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics.

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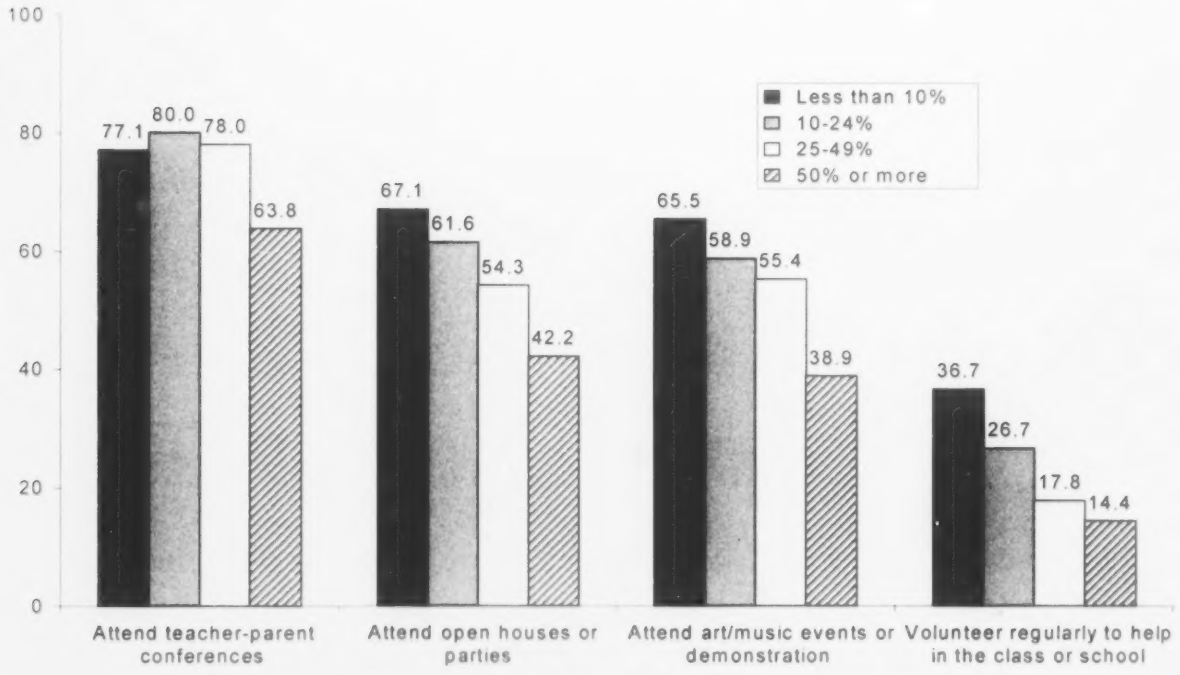
Figure 4. – Average percentage of parents participating in various activities during the kindergarten year, by the percent of children in the school eligible for free or reduced lunch*: Spring 1999



* This variable has an item-level missing value rate of 26 percent; thus results should be interpreted with caution.

Source: Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Kindergarten Class of 1998-1999: Base Year Public-use Data Files. U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics.

Table 4 – Average percentage of parents participating in various activities during the kindergarten year, by various school characteristics: Spring 1999

Characteristic	Attend teacher-parent conferences	s.e.	Attend open houses or parties	s.e.	Attend art/music events or demonstration	s.e.	Volunteer regularly to help in the class or school	s.e.
All kindergarten teachers	72.4	0.87	53.6	0.79	50.9	0.99	23.2	0.56
Percent ELL in school								
less than 10%	73.0	1.10	55.4	1.05	54.8	1.11	25.4	0.75
10-24%	76.3	1.77	49.3	3.87	41.5	3.86	17.6	1.26
25-49%	70.1	2.53	45.4	2.44	37.5	2.97	15.4	1.11
50% or more	77.3	2.49	50.3	3.13	36.3	2.73	16.3	1.85
Percent minority in school								
less than 10%	78.2	2.12	63.9	1.82	64.3	1.95	29.7	1.52
10-24%	78.0	1.62	56.5	1.95	58.0	2.17	27.4	1.50
25-49%	73.7	1.70	52.0	2.43	47.5	2.02	21.3	1.57
50% or more	64.3	1.73	42.9	1.43	36.3	1.59	16.0	0.91
Percent free/reduced lunch in school*								
less than 10%	77.1	1.96	67.1	2.37	65.5	2.49	36.7	2.16
10-24%	80.0	2.04	61.6	2.41	58.9	3.29	26.7	1.66
25-49%	78.0	1.17	54.3	2.23	55.4	2.56	17.8	0.86
50% or more	63.8	1.74	42.2	1.31	38.9	1.59	14.4	0.72
School sector								
Public	72.1	1.04	51.5	0.99	48.2	1.21	20.3	0.55
Catholic	82.7	1.85	66.1	2.24	71.3	2.30	36.9	2.54
Other Private	74.7	2.23	62.9	2.47	63.2	2.64	36.0	2.60

* This variable has an item-level missing value rate of 26 percent; thus results should be interpreted with caution.

Source: Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Kindergarten Class of 1998-1999: Base-year Public-use Data Files. U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics.

Table 5 – Average percent of parents participating in various activities, by transition-to-kindergarten activity: Kindergarten Year 1998-1999

Activity	Attend teacher-parent conferences	s.e.	Attend open houses or parties	s.e.	Attend art/music events or demonstration	s.e.	Volunteer regularly to help in the classroom or school	s.e.
Phone or send home information about kindergarten program								
YES	73.7	0.91	55.2	0.88	53.1	1.02	24.2	0.58
NO	64.5	2.11	43.6	2.02	38.5	2.60	17.4	1.96
Preschoolers spend some time in kindergarten classroom								
YES	75.6	0.95	57.3	1.23	56.5	1.48	25.4	0.93
NO	70.0	1.07	50.9	0.94	46.7	1.14	21.7	0.75
School days shortened at start of year								
YES	72.5	1.80	53.8	1.85	49.5	2.22	26.1	1.49
NO	72.5	0.91	53.6	0.86	51.3	1.05	22.7	0.60
Parents and children visit kindergarten prior to start of year								
YES	74.8	0.74	56.4	0.82	54.6	1.04	25.2	0.65
NO	63.4	2.02	43.4	1.52	37.5	1.49	15.4	0.84
Teacher visits homes at beginning of kindergarten year								
YES	73.8	3.64	58.7	4.07	62.3	3.00	29.4	3.47
NO	72.4	0.91	53.4	0.79	50.4	1.04	23.0	0.60
Parents come to orientation at school before kindergarten year								
YES	74.9	0.76	56.1	0.86	53.8	1.04	25.0	0.66
NO	65.3	1.85	46.1	1.54	42.6	1.61	17.7	1.20

Source: Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Kindergarten Class of 1998-1999: Base-year Public-use Data Files. U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics.

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